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Arrested Development in India
The Historical Dimension

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**CLASS AND ECONOMIC CHANGE IN
CENTRAL INDIA:
THE NARMADA VALLEY 1820-1930**

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MANOHAR
1988

This paper is part of a larger work whose purpose is to question the relative importance of changes in social structure and economic activity, the availability of natural and human resources, and the impact of colonial rule in allowing, encouraging, or positively restraining economic development in different areas of the British-ruled Central Provinces and Berar. It is the intention to derive from this conclusions that may be of relevance in the formulation of contemporary development policies. A valuable tool in the course of this study has been the concept of the agro-economic zone, which has been used as a unit of political economy. The geographical limits of these zones are illustrated in the accompanying map. In the course of the research startling differences have emerged between the class structures and different trajectories of development followed by each zone. In turn this has raised important questions about the role of dependency in the analysis of class, and the relationship between class, or the social relations of production, and the process of economic change.

The Narmada valley wheat zone, the subject of this paper, is just one of the agro-economic zones of central India, but it presents a classic example of how economic 'growth' can occur in the absence of 'development'.¹ The arrested nature of development in the Narmada valley was partly an effect of colonial rule, but colonial rule was only one of the number of factors that shaped the contrasting patterns of growth and

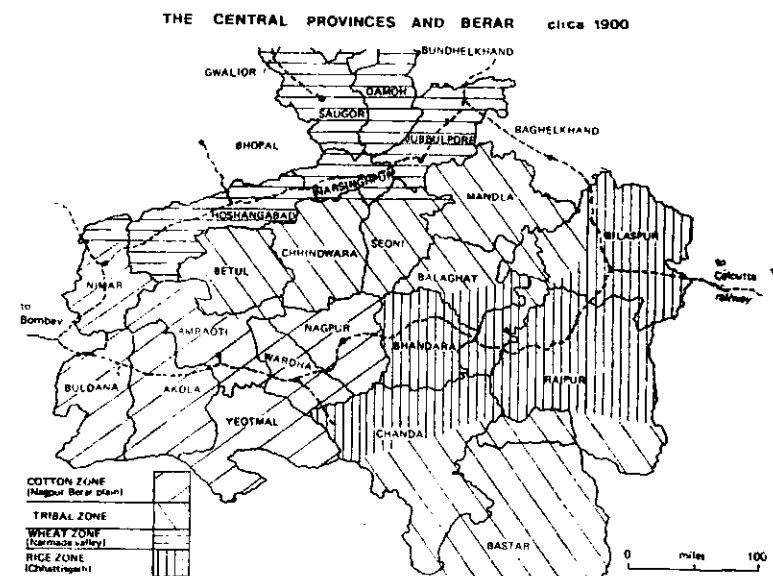
surplus distribution to be found in central India. Equally important were the pre-colonial history, class structure and ecological characteristics of each of the agro-economic zones. As important as the class structure within zones was the relationship between them, since inequalities between regions encouraged interdependence and inter-regional exploitation in a variety of forms.

The British first took over the administration of the Narmada valley in 1818, and the early years of their rule saw the desolation and depopulation of the region under an oppressive system of land revenue collection. Land was abundant and labour at a premium, but in the mid-1830s the British determined to reverse this situation for reasons of financial and political expediency. The *malguzars* (the revenue farmers of the former Maratha system) were pushed steadily to the Furej and in the revenue settlements of the 1860s they were given exclusive rights of ownership over most of the land. Land revenue was then collected solely from this class at a reduced rate. The *naqdi*, or substantial, cash-paying tenants (similar to the *mirasdars* of western India) were guaranteed occupancy rights and large holdings at fixed rents. The remainder of the tenants were left entirely at the mercy of the *malguzars*, who could dispose of the land however they liked. Adjacent forest areas were reserved exclusively for the use of the government. The tribal populations of these tracts were caught in between, cut off from any possibility of settling in the lowlands, and forbidden rights of ownership or allowed only very limited rights of occupancy, in their former homelands.

There thus developed a regional division of the classes, with capital owners being confined largely to the centre of the valley and a sizeable portion of the labouring population residing in the less fertile lands and in the hills. In the long term, big tenants and *malguzari* landlords were able to take advantage of their control of the land and the availability of cheap migrant labour. They established a symbiotic relationship with firms of exporters such as Vale, King and Co. and Ralli Brothers, who began sending their agents into the Narmada valley in the middle of the nineteenth century. International demand and the opening of the railway to Bombay meant that valuable surpluses could easily be extracted from this grain-rich country, and small fortunes were quickly made. The development, however, was forced and immature, being based princi-

pally on the super-exploitation of labour rather than the capitalization of assets, and by the early 1890s a crisis in production had become apparent which was compounded by the catastrophic impact of successive monsoon failures at the turn of the century.

If this brief history were to be viewed from a neo-classical or purely ecological perspective the shades of emphasis would change markedly. In the process, important questions would go unanswered such as, why was there no 'trickle-down' in income distribution, why did poverty, low wages and indebtedness persist (and even increase) on such a vast scale, and why did the economic development of the Narmada valley fail to become both progressive and self-sustaining? In particular, why was this system of economy so susceptible to external shocks and so incapable of adaptation without a major loss of output? Ecological and conventional neo-classical economic arguments give only partial and unsatisfactory answers to these questions.² By concentrating on the class structure of the Narmada valley, this article sets out to address these issues and attempts to discover the role played by class in the hey-days and, importantly, in the ultimate failure of the wheat boom of the late nineteenth century.



Trade and Agricultural Growth

The growth in agricultural production in the Narmada valley is illustrated by the statistics given in Table 1 which shows the total area under the principal crop in all of the wheat-growing districts. Land in parts of the adjacent tribal districts of Betul, Chhindwara and particularly Seoni was increasingly turned over to wheat cultivation during the colonial period, often by encroaching land-grabbers from the valley. For this reason the wheat acreages in these districts have been included in the totals for the Narmada valley. The object of the table is to illustrate the development of production for the purpose of trade. Aggregated simply for the districts of the wheat zone, the resulting trends, shown by the accompanying indices, illustrate more accurately the actual experience of the region than if I had reproduced official aggregates based on administrative divisions or calculated for the province as a whole. Though they involve much less trouble, official aggregates such as these disguise the regional character of economic growth.

TABLE 1

ACREAGE UNDER THE PRINCIPAL CROP IN THE WHEAT ZONE

	'000 Acres	Indices		'000 Acres	Indices
1867-68	2385.6	100.0	1888-89	2742.6	115.0
1868-69	2114.3	88.6	1889-90	2524.5	105.8
1869-70	2333.2	97.8	1890-91	—	0.0
1870-71	2471.4	103.6	1891-92	2699.3	113.1
1871-72	2467.6	103.4	1892-93	2818.9	118.2
1872-73	2453.3	102.8	1893-94	2668.7	111.9
1873-74	2405.6	100.8	1894-95	2037.2	85.4
1874-75	2447.0	102.6	1895-96	1645.4	69.0
1875-76	2380.7	99.8	1896-97	1185.1	49.7
1876-77	2439.8	102.2	1897-98	1277.3	53.5
1877-78	2595.1	108.8	1898-99	1521.0	63.8
1878-79	2011.4	84.3	1899-1900	1078.5	45.2
1879-80	1919.6	80.5	1900-01	1370.9	57.5
1880-81	2185.1	91.6	1901-02	1722.1	72.2
1881-82	2476.7	103.8	1902-03	1582.8	66.3
1882-83	2494.4	104.6	1903-04	2065.9	86.8
1883-84	2555.9	107.1	1904-05	2057.6	86.3
1884-85	2712.6	113.7	1905-06	2046.5	85.8
1885-86	2807.5	117.7	1906-07	2169.9	91.0
1886-87	2764.3	115.9	1907-08	1678.9	70.4
1887-88	3062.8	128.4	1908-09	1598.6	67.0

1909-10	1781.7	74.7	1930-31	1807.6	75.8
1910-11	2130.6	89.3	1931-32	2016.3	84.5
1911-12	2217.5	93.0	1932-33	2108.3	88.4
1912-13	2281.9	95.7	1933-34	2163.7	90.7
1913-14	2083.1	87.3	1934-35	2269.0	95.1
1914-15	2000.3	83.8	1935-36	2107.1	88.3
1915-16	2003.0	84.0	1936-37	2008.0	84.2
1916-17	2216.8	92.9	1937-38	2110.3	88.5
1917-18	2321.7	97.3	1938-39	2125.9	89.1
1918-19	1766.4	74.0	1939-40	2056.6	86.2
1919-20	2077.3	87.1	1940-41	1996.0	83.7
1920-21	1822.0	76.4	1941-42	1700.5	73.8
1921-22	1655.2	69.4	1942-43	1520.3	63.7
1922-23	2030.3	85.1	1943-44	1607.8	67.4
1923-24	2156.8	90.4	1944-45	1532.9	64.3
1924-25	2176.3	91.2	1945-46	1540.4	64.6
1925-26	2256.8	94.6	1946-47	1693.3	71.0
1926-27	2335.7	97.9	1947-48	1031.5	43.2
1927-28	2342.2	98.2	1948-49	1111.9	46.6
1928-29	1831.5	76.8	1949-50	1533.9	65.1
1929-30	1718.7	72.0	1950-51	1675.8	70.2

Note: See appendix for sources.

The statistics on the acreages under different crops are one of the more reliable indicators of the state of the agricultural economy produced by the colonial administration. Estimates of total output are more arbitrary, as although figures on the average yield of different crops are available, these are relatively unhelpful unless combined with the *annevari* estimates made annually by village *patwaris* indicating the quality of the harvest. Although acreage statistics are derived from similar sources, they were nonetheless verified by measurement at each settlement, as well as by occasional spot checks in between. By contrast, the science of estimating the crop output was nowhere near so well developed. Since they depended on a subjective comparison between the current season and that which had preceded it the estimates are quite useless as a means of indicating long-term trends, though they retain some value as a measure of short-term fluctuations. Multiplying acreage by yield estimates to calculate statistics of total output only tends to compound the errors inherent in their compilation.³

Immediately striking is the increase in wheat cultivation up to 1887-88, and rapid decline to a fairly stable plateau after 1892-93. Annual fluctuations in yields and acreages overlaid

this pattern before and after these dates, but the scale of the reduction after 1892-93 clearly marks a qualitative transformation in production. This transformation is all the more striking when the wheat acreage is compared with the gross cultivated acreage in the wheat zone (Table 2). Once again, 1887-88 marks the peak year in wheat production, with over 53 per cent of the gross cultivated acreage occupied by this crop. Eight years later only one third of the area was cultivated with wheat; by 1909-10 little more than one quarter of the gross cultivated area was under wheat, and by 1947-48 less than 18 per cent.

TABLE 2

PRINCIPAL CROP AS PERCENTAGE OF GROSS CROPPED AREA
IN THE WHEAT ZONE

	%s	Indices		%s	Indices
1867-68	46.9	99.2	1897-98	28.6	60.6
1868-69	42.7	90.4	1898-99	33.4	70.8
1869-70	45.0	95.2	1899-1900	26.2	55.4
1870-71	46.0	97.5	1900-01	30.1	63.7
1871-72	46.7	99.0	1901-02	35.2	74.6
1872-73	45.4	96.1	1902-03	31.0	65.7
1873-74	46.3	98.0	1903-04	40.2	85.2
1874-75	47.2	100.0	1904-05	40.2	85.0
1875-76	45.2	95.8	1905-06	39.4	83.4
1876-77	45.4	96.1	1906-07	40.6	86.0
1877-78	46.1	97.5	1907-08	35.5	75.1
1878-79	36.8	77.9	1908-09	31.6	66.9
1879-80	34.2	72.3	1909-10	28.0	59.2
1880-81	37.9	80.3	1910-11	32.8	69.4
1881-82	42.3	89.5	1911-12	33.6	71.2
1882-83	42.5	90.1	1912-13	35.2	74.4
1883-84	43.2	91.5	1913-14	34.5	73.0
1884-85	51.3	108.6	1914-15	30.7	65.0
1885-86	51.5	109.0	1915-16	30.0	63.6
1886-87	49.7	105.3	1916-17	32.9	69.6
1887-88	53.5	113.3	1917-18	36.8	77.9
1888-89	50.4	106.6	1918-19	29.0	61.5
1889-90	47.0	99.5	1919-20	33.2	70.3
1890-91	—	0.0	1920-21	31.3	66.3
1891-92	51.1	108.2	1921-22	27.6	58.5
1892-93	51.1	108.3	1922-23	32.5	68.8
1893-94	49.5	104.9	1923-24	34.7	73.5
1894-95	37.4	79.2	1924-25	34.2	72.4
1895-96	33.1	70.0	1925-26	35.4	75.0
1896-97	27.5	58.1	1926-27	36.5	77.3

1927-28	35.6	75.4	1939-40	31.7	67.1
1928-29	27.5	58.3	1940-41	30.4	64.3
1929-30	27.1	57.4	1941-42	27.6	58.4
1930-31	27.7	58.6	1942-43	24.0	50.8
1931-32	30.8	65.2	1943-44	24.2	51.2
1932-33	32.3	68.4	1944-45	23.8	50.3
1933-34	32.1	67.9	1945-46	24.5	51.8
1934-35	34.3	72.6	1946-47	26.7	56.5
1935-36	32.3	68.4	1947-48	17.0	36.0
1936-37	30.1	63.7	1948-49	17.3	36.5
1937-38	31.7	67.1	1949-50	24.0	50.8
1938-39	32.0	67.7	1950-51	26.3	55.8

Note: See appendix for sources.

Taken district by district, the figures are in some cases even more striking. In 1887-88, in Hoshangabad for example, wheat cultivation was 53 per cent up on the level in 1867-68, while the area under cotton, rice, sugarcane and other foodgrains was halved. In Narsinghpur, 1867-68 saw an abundant wheat crop, so 1887-88 was only 12 per cent up on this, but rice cultivation fell by half, cotton fell to less than half its former level, and sugarcane production dropped to 25 per cent of its level in 1867-68. Since sugarcane required the best soil and intensive cultivation and was the most expensive crop to produce, the fall in the area under cane from 7,800 acres to 1,600 acres in Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad combined marked a clear diversion of capital resources. Meanwhile, wheat production peaked in 1887-88 with a total of 969,400 acres being devoted to the crop (including mixtures of wheat and gram). By 1894-95, however, only 689,800 acres were under wheat in the two districts; by 1909-10 only 465,100 acres; and by 1942-43 only 366,800 acres. Significantly, there was no increase in sugarcane cultivation,⁴ the principal increases taking place in the area under gram, fodder, and the cheap, inferior foodgrains such as *juar*, *kodon* and *kutki*.

In Jabalpur, the 1887-88 peak was marked by a 32 per cent increase in wheat acreages compared with 1867-68, after which the cultivators fell back on the production of rice, gram and other pulses. In Saugor and Damoh the wheat acreage increased from 681,400 acres to 884,100, before falling to 465,900 in 1894-95. There was a slow recovery thereafter, though once again *juar* and fodder tended to become relatively more important. In Betul, Seoni and Chhindwara much smaller acreages of wheat were involved, but a similar ebb and

flow was to be seen, with *kodon* and *kutki* (grains commonly associated with tribal modes of cultivation) being the most common resort as the popularity of wheat declined.

Wheat cultivation had begun to increase in the 1850s with the growth of demand from Malwa, followed by a demand from cotton-growing tracts for foodgrain as land formerly devoted to food crops was taken over by cotton during the period of the American civil war. Thus despite the completion of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway through the Narmada valley in 1870 there was no sudden increase in demand and the acreage under wheat did not expand dramatically overall until after 1880-81. The statistics on exports by rail (Table 3) show a very gradual increase in exports before that in response to a slow rise in price.

TABLE 3
WHEAT EXPORTS BY RAIL
(five-year averages)

	Maunds (in 000s)	Rupees (in 000s)
C.P. only		
1866-71	495	1,482
1871-76	1,461	3,411
1876-81	3,641	6,515
C.P. & Berar		
1881-86	8,406	15,736
1886-91	8,254	19,084
1891-96	4,925	18,379
1896-1901	1,359	4,372
1901-06	3,221	9,277
1906-11	1,459	5,132
1911-16	4,058	15,221
1916-21	2,806	13,054
1921-26	2,472	13,743
1926-31	1,478	7,995
1931-33	1,392	4,496

Source: Central Provinces, Berar, and Central Provinces & Berar, *Reports on Trade and Resources and Reports on Railborne Traffic*.

Note: The figures before 1903-04 include trade between the CP and Berar.

The key year was 1876-77, when wheat first surpassed cotton as the province's most valuable export crop. That year also saw a considerable leap forward in the acreage under wheat in

Narsinghpur. The expansion in Hoshangabad started earliest of all, in 1868-69, Narsinghpur leapt forward in 1876-77 (excluding the poor monsoon seasons of 1878-79 and 1879-80), while Jabalpur was a late starter in 1884-85. This expansion in cultivated acreages and the areas under wheat went ahead without any upsurge in population growth to consume the increased output. Although Harda town in Hoshangabad (population 13,945 in 1891) came to have a larger population than the district capital as a result of its strategic position in the wheat trade, the population of the district as a whole registered little change before the 1880s. In neighbouring Narsinghpur district, the population increased by only 8 per cent between 1881 and 1891, and actually declined in the Narsinghpur tahsil.

The growth of the export trade was given its first fillip by the abolition of an export duty in January 1873 (which amounted to three annas per maund), an all-round reduction in freight rates of 30 per cent, the abolition of certain terminal charges, and the opening of the Suez Canal.⁵ At an all-India level, retail prices rose in fits and starts, climbing at times to sudden peaks, such as one in 1878, a scarcity year, when the price was 79 per cent above the 1873 base. Bombay wholesale prices were more steady, but reached a clear plateau of around Rs. 3.70 per maund between 1888 and 1895 (see Table 4).⁶ The relative price of gram and barley and other substitute *rabi* crops could greatly influence the production of wheat.⁷ This relationship ran clearly in favour of wheat in the Bombay wholesale market in the late nineteenth century, a trend which was sharply reversed in the 1890s and persisted in this form until the end of the First World War.

Of greater importance to Narmada valley cultivators was the trend in local prices. Before the opening of through rail communications, it was said that the prices at Hoshangabad 'were often arbitrarily fixed by a ring of dealers, the demand not being large enough to induce outside competition'.⁸ Settlement officers at this time compiled local price indices on the basis of *malguzars*' and grain-dealers' account books. Between 1851 and 1855, wheat sold on average for one rupee per maund in Hoshangabad, gram for Rs. 0.60 per maund, and between 1856 and 1860 wheat sold for only Rs. 0.92 per maund on average. Over 1861-65 the average price of wheat was

TABLE 4

INDEX NUMBERS OF THE AVERAGE PRICE OF 'KHANDWA'
WHEAT IN THE BOMBAY WHOLESALE MARKET, 1867-1931

(1873 = 100 = Rs. 3.68 per maund)			
1867	99	1899	107
1868	112	1900	109
1869	107	1901	107
1870	114	1902	96
1871	57	1903	91
1872	87	1904	91
1873	100	1905	92
1874	76	1906	99
1875	73	1907	94
1876	75	1908	137
1877	99	1909	144
1878	115	1910	119
1879	134	1911	101
1880	114	1912	106
1881	79	1913	110
1882	90	1914	124
1883	90	1915	149
1884	72	1916	126
1885	69	1917	131
1886	89	1918	215
1887	97	1919	241
1888	103	1920	191
1889	100	1921	199
1890	92	1922	346
1891	98	1923	221
1892	113	1924	213
1893	100	1925	218
1894	99	1926	216
1895	104	1927	243
1896	97	1928	228
1897	154	1929	279
1898	153	1930	221
		1931	165

Source: *Index Numbers of Indian Prices, 1861-1931* (Delhi, 1933), Table VI.

Rs. 1.91. A shortage of rain over central India as a whole in 1868-69 helped a further rise in wheat prices, leading to a quinquennial average of Rs. 2.65 per maund in 1866-70. The price of gram rose too, but always remained slightly lower.⁹ Another peak occurred in 1878-79 due to famine in north India

and a local attack of blight. Normally though, the local wholesale price of wheat ranged only just over Rs. 2.5 per maund, peaking at Rs. 3 in 1888-89 and just over Rs. 3 again in 1891-92. The average price quoted for Hoshangabad between 1886 and 1890 was Rs. 2.6 per maund and was closely matched by the average rates fixed by panchayats of *malguzars* and tenants at the same time for converting grain rents into cash rents in Narsinghpur.¹⁰

None of these price rises was spectacular enough on its own to account for the increase in wheat production, and the changes in price correlate imperfectly with the increases in crop acreages and the statistics on trade. Furthermore, it is difficult to account for the onset of a decline in the wheat trade come the 1890s, or its continuation, by reference to price changes alone since local prices were consistently reaching much higher levels, peaking at Rs. 3.5 or Rs. 4 per maund in the post-famine period between 1900 and 1917.¹¹ These and many other factors determined the profitability of wheat cultivation, but profitability, in the strictest terms, was only one of a number of factors determining the actual pattern of peasant production.

Initially, much of the increase in exports recorded by rail was simply the result of the reorientation of trade which had formerly gone by road. Not until 1889 was Saugor connected to the railway, but before then the improvement of the road connecting Saugor to Kareli railhead in Narsinghpur meant that a great deal of traffic that had formerly headed north-eastwards towards Mirzapur now came onto the line. The construction of the Indian Midland Railway connecting Hoshangabad and Bhopal in 1882 added further to rail traffic. The pack-bullock trade all but disappeared and there occurred a decentralization of trade, with grain dealers establishing themselves at each railway station, as well as at the large markets of Harda, Seoni, and Itarsi in Hoshangabad.¹² Produce from Seoni district also headed south by road to Nagpur for export.¹³ In Hoshangabad there were 17 stations and here, and in neighbouring Narsinghpur and Jabalpur districts, there was hardly a single village of any importance situated more than twelve miles from a station.

The relatively low price of Narmada wheat and the improvement in communications induced Ralli Brothers and at least

eight other European firms to send their agents into the valley to buy up the *pissi*, or soft white wheats grown here. These wheats mixed well with European-produced grains and were ideal for export.¹⁴ Locally, it was always *juar*, *kodon*, *kutki* and the hard wheats that were consumed and the *pissi* wheat used to be sold at a discount of 8 to 10 per cent, but with the growth of European demand this situation was reversed and *pissi* wheat became valued at least 12 per cent higher than the hard *jalalia* or *kathia* varieties after 1877.¹⁵ As a result, the proportion of U.K. wheat and flour imports supplied by India rose from 5 per cent in 1880 to 16.7 per cent in 1886, and the Central Provinces provided the lion's share of the grain.¹⁶ Only in 1871-72, a year of abundant harvests and low prices, did the first reports come from the Jabalpur division of exports of Narmada wheat being made to England by Messrs. Nicol and Co. of Bombay,¹⁷ but by 1888-89 the trade had reached its height. That year the failure of the Russian harvest and bad crops all over the rest of Europe forced European demand to a peak, and the Central Provinces exported a total of 7,106,760 cwt to Bombay and Calcutta ports, the nearest rival being the Punjab, with an export of 3,090,676 cwt.¹⁸

A key role in the growth of this trade was played by the European traders working in league with local *mahajans*, who amassed bulk supplies of the grain and transported it to Bombay. An asset was the low freight charges, which amounted to less than 22 per cent of the Bombay retail price from Saugor, and were lower still for the rest of the valley.¹⁹ Besides the European merchants, there were also the travelling agents of the Bhattia firms at Bombay and the Marwari grain-dealers who bought and exported on receipt of telegraphic orders from Bombay.²⁰ Collectively they were known as the *pakka arhatiyas* or wholesale merchants of the trade. Unlike in the Bombay Deccan, Hyderabad and Berar, the *kachcha arhatiya*, or small commission agent, a source of finance to both cultivator and village *bania*, was less important. In the Narmada valley wheat trade, the big wholesale merchants bought directly from the local *ganjes* or wholesale markets (otherwise known as *golas* or *handis*) and the itinerant trader buying at *hats* or periodic markets or in the villages was a feature confined largely to Chhattisgarh and the remoter districts of the tribal zone.²¹

Forms of Surplus Appropriation

One source suggests that in Hoshangabad district, in the centre of the Narmada valley, the wheat boom was primarily the result of the *malguzars* of the valley engaging in direct cultivation.²² Yet it is arguable that class differentiation within these tracts was more acute than elsewhere in central India at the time, and that differentiation on a regional scale played a more important role in fomenting the wheat boom of the 1870s and 1880s. The key to the continuance of the trade was the very low cost at which *mahajans*, *malguzars* and the cultivating elite were able to amass a marketable surplus, by using cheap tribal labour and by raising rent, debt and other charges on their tenants and sub-tenants. These methods allowed a brief period of very rapid growth, but ultimately led to a precipitate collapse of the wheat economy at the end of the century.

The exploitation of unprotected tenants can be shown by an analysis of the impact of British settlement policy and by reference to the available statistics on land-holding. Taking a closer look, it is apparent that the class of the substantial tenantry, descended from the *naqdi* of the early nineteenth century, was as important in terms of production as the *malguzars*. The absolute occupancy area, or at least the area held under this right, covered 25 per cent of the total occupied area in Hoshangabad in the early 1890s, a larger proportion than anywhere else in the Central Provinces. The *malguzars* cultivated only 21 per cent of the area. A similar class of substantial tenants was important elsewhere in the Narmada valley. In the *haveli* lands between the Narmada and Hiran rivers in Jabalpur district, there were said to be a great many substantial Brahmin tenants with large holdings, cultivated by means of farm-servants (*halwahas*).²³ One of Stokes' sources reports that two-thirds of the total net income (after payment of the government revenue) of Hoshangabad *malguzars* came from the profits reaped from direct cultivation, but this diverts attention from the amount of land sublet by this class of privileged tenants. Furthermore, the concealment of subletting was general by the 1890s for fear that subtenants might claim occupancy rights and because, if the high level of sub-rents paid were uncovered by settlement officers, this would almost certainly lead to an enhancement in the revenue demand. In Narsinghpur, in fact, twice the amount of *malguzari* home-farm land was

found to be leased (16 per cent) than in Hoshangabad (8 per cent), and the 1925 revenue administration report states that 30 per-cent of the occupied area was actually cultivated by subtenants in Hoshangabad. Much of this area was undoubtedly contained in the larger holdings, and it would be difficult to maintain that subletting on this scale had only sprung up after the turn of the century.

On average, subtenants on the *malguzars' sir* land in Hoshangabad were reportedly paying Rs. 3.66 per acre by the 1890s, or more than double the rate paid by ordinary tenants, whose rents, in turn, had been jacked up by 102 per cent by the *malguzars* over the previous 30 years. In Narsinghpur, 2,434 out of 19,823 acres of *malguzari sir* land rented out was leased on a 50:50 sharecropping basis, known as *batia*. J.B. Fuller thus concluded that the strength of the *malguzars* of the Narmada valley was exceptional and that 'they have been able to divert to themselves the profits of a large proportion of their ryots by rack-renting, pure and simple, such as is rarely practised elsewhere'.²⁴ Absolute occupancy tenants, in contrast, had suffered only a 4.1 per cent increase in their rent rate per acre over the 30 years since the first settlement in Hoshangabad. This increased both the prosperity of the absolute occupancy tenants as a class, as well as the value of their land as an investment. Hence the appearance that 'in many villages there are now absolute-occupancy tenants who are tenants only in name, being moneylenders who have purchased holdings, and who lease them out again at high rents to cultivators'.²⁵

In this respect, government reports and accounts based upon them are victims of a delusion that the agrarian economy actually functioned according to official writ. Officials preferred to think that the family farm was strengthened by the operation of tenancy laws, but in fact they were widely circumvented, and English law remained an alien imposition, just as it does today. The growing use of *nazranas* (gifts and gratuities) and other irregularities as a means of evading tenancy legislation means that the amount of sub-tenancy reported in official sources is probably a marked underestimate. Thus:

of late years, instances have occurred in Harda of peculiar transactions affecting occupancy rights. In some cases *malguzars* have

sold at high prices pieces of land with the occupancy status and a low rental to moneylenders and others desiring an investment. Other cases have occurred in which *malguzars* have given to their relations vacant holdings together with the status of an occupancy tenant. This transaction is in most cases only a nominal one, made by some astute *malguzar* in order to prevent the acquisition of tenant-right by the real cultivator, who thus only becomes a subtenant of his relation, and also in order to keep off the record the real rents paid by these cultivators and so exclude them from the [taxable] assets of the village.²⁶

There was also in Saugor, the case of the *galliya* serf, the cause of some official dispute, who was described as follows:

many a moneylending *malguzar* in this district deliberately refrains from rent enhancement. When his operations have extended far enough he reduces his tenants to the position of '*galliyas*', a term used locally to denote these cultivators who hand over the whole of the produce (*gulla*) of their land to the *malguzar* in satisfaction of debt. It is obvious that when this condition of affairs exists the *malguzar* is getting all he possibly can out of the land. The rent is an unimportant item.²⁷

Nazranas were noticed to be generally prevalent after the second settlement. They usually took the form of premia paid to a landlord on the lease of a holding, representing the capitalized difference between the actual and the so-called economic rent of the holding. Alternatively the term referred to consent-money paid to the same person on the transfer of a holding from one tenant to another.²⁸ The average *nazrana* paid at the time of the 1913-18 settlement of Hoshangabad worked out at approximately Rs. 14 an acre, or about 10½ years' rental. In the Harda tahsil, tenants stated that they typically paid from Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 an acre, and from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40 for the very best quality land. An examination by the settlement officers of the accounts of certain *malguzars* revealed that they received Rs. 60,668 as consent-money on the transfer of 16,428 acres (rental Rs. 21,975) from tenant to tenant, giving a total income of Rs. 12 lakhs from *nazranas* against an average rental demand of Rs. 10.5 lakhs per annum. To this total, the settlement officer considered that 33 per cent might be added to account for concealment, giving a total amount paid equivalent to more than one and one-half times the annual rental

demand of the district. The sum paid to the *malguzar* might be considered as capital invested in land and interest allowed on it at 8 per cent, thus giving a further supplement to income totalling Rs. 172 lakhs.²⁹ Overall, the income from *nazranas* was 166 per cent on top of that from rents *per se*. If then we assume that something like a modest 30 per cent of home-farm land was sublet (instead of the figure of just over 8 per cent cited for Hoshangabad), then the income from direct cultivation is comparatively unimportant. In addition, there were the *khot*, *batai* and *taksim* forms of charging rents which did not always find adequate reflection in the statistics. The *khot* rent was a fixed grain payment which had started in the Harda tahsil (where it was extremely common), and had spread right up the valley by the early 1890s, the Jabalpur equivalent being the *bhag* rent.³⁰ A variation on the *khot* system was known as *taksim*. In one example, a tenant was found to have sublet 108 acres, supplying twelve bullocks for the ploughing, a subtenant doing all the work and bringing with him a further four cattle:

when the crop was reaped, the tenant took grain to the value of Rs. 375 *plus* the seed sown and all the costs of cultivation. The grain that was left was then divided, twelve-sixteenths going to the tenant and four-sixteenths to the subtenant, who must have realised little more than *coolie*-hire out of the transaction.³¹

The share-crop tenure known as *batai*, as found in Narsinghpur, was common elsewhere in the Narmada valley. The custom was that the landlord gave the land and advanced the seed while the tenant supplied bullocks and labour. After the crop was reaped, the seed equivalent was returned to the landlord with interest at 50 per cent, the hired labour employed in reaping and the dues of the village servants were paid, and only then was the balance of the crops divided equally between the landlord and the cultivator.

The most notorious landlords in Hoshangabad were those of the Harda tahsil. Overall, they enhanced rents by 133 per cent during the course of the first settlement and in some villages, such as the Pokharni group, the ordinary rent-rate was trebled, rising from Rs. 1.26 to Rs. 3.46 per acre. Rents in kind were sometimes forced even on occupancy tenants amounting to three maunds to the acre (worth at least Rs. 7), a sum which had to be paid, regardless of the quality of the harvest.³²

Antagonism between landlord and tenants was high in this tahsil, but things could hardly have been any better in neighbouring Narsinghpur district if the statistics on litigation contained in the Central Provinces administration reports are to be believed. A common ruse here was for *malguzars* systematically to levy rent instalments in advance of the due date and well before the harvest, forcing tenants into rapidly mounting arrears, so that each year they had to surrender their entire crop to him.³³ This sort of deeply exploitative relationship between landlords and their tenants was the rotten core that lay behind the superficial abundance of the Narmada valley economy.

Indebtedness and the Credit System

Debt was especially important and was another form of surplus appropriation that yielded far greater returns than direct cultivation. The price of wheat seed was high and tenant cultivators traditionally borrowed seed at the beginning of each season, paying it back again with interest. The custom was widespread and became more so as the market price of wheat increased. Moneylenders, *malguzars* and the agents of Bombay trading firms saw this as an important means of gaining a greater share in the crop. J.B. Fuller commented that this business was far more lucrative to a *malguzar* than any rent enhancement.³⁴ Even the smaller wheat tracts of western Bilaspur were exploited in this fashion, with Bombay agents based in Jabalpur advancing money to cultivators in order to gain a lien on the next harvest's produce.³⁵ In the Narmada valley the forestalling of crops in this fashion was uncommon simply because the moneylending *malguzar* was already in there first.³⁶ The Dufferin enquiry of 1888 revealed that out of 46 tenants in Hoshangabad only 12 were out of debt. The remaining 34 owed in aggregate Rs. 18,300, a sum four times the rental charge on their land. The high price of wheat meant that interest on these grain loans, formerly 25 per cent per annum, was now sometimes charged at 50 per cent for six months. Two typical suits were for the recovery of grain to the value of Rs. 990 and Rs. 2,940 on original loans amounting to Rs. 60 and Rs. 140. The situation was similar in Narsinghpur and Jabalpur, and out of 920 tenants questioned in Saugor and Damoh only one-fifth were found to be out of debt.³⁷

The quantity of this debt was less important than the unique fact that a larger proportion of the debt than perhaps anywhere else in India at the time consisted of loans of seed grain, repaid in kind at harvest end, with interest. In 1937 it was estimated that 40 per cent of the cultivators habitually borrowed all their seed grain, a further 20 per cent needed to borrow between 20 and 30 per cent of their requirements, and 10 per cent usually stored all they needed, but occasionally had to borrow whenever there was a shortfall in the harvest. By contrast, in Bihar, cultivators were thought to retain enough to meet all their own seed requirements, and in the surplus areas of the Punjab (for example, in the Canal Colony zone around Lyallpur) more than 83 per cent did so. In Bombay Presidency, Gujarat and the Carnatic most wheat cultivators kept their own seed and only 5 to 25 per cent of the remainder borrowed. Only in Hyderabad and parts of Baroda and the poorest parts of the U.P. did cultivators traditionally part with all their crop and borrow seed grain for the next year's harvest. The Narmada valley, however, had a lower population density and produced abundant surpluses and yet the majority still borrowed their seed grain. Furthermore, unlike in the Deccan and elsewhere, where the small village *bania* or shopkeeper was the usual resort for loans of seed grain, in the Narmada valley 60 per cent was borrowed from *malguzars* or large landlords, 35 per cent from other large cultivators, and only 5 per cent from the village *bania*.³⁸ This phenomenon could be traced back to the importance of the *mahajan-malguzar* in first settling the region in the early nineteenth century and it gave such individuals, and the more substantial tenants, a directing control over the means of production far in excess of what is suggested by the raw statistics on landholding or rents. This control was of crucial importance during the boom years of the wheat trade.

Further down the Narmada valley from Saugor and Jabalpur, as many as 62 per cent of the *malguzars* (in Hoshangabad) were free of debt, large debts only being held by those who could afford them, according to the Central Provinces provincial banking survey conducted in the late 1920s.³⁹ Relative to the value of estates, *malguzari* debt in Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad was small. A substantial number of tenants here were also free of debt, but there were more hopelessly indebted here than anywhere else in central India. Over the

wheat zone as a whole there was some of the largest proportions of the tenantry involved, all but a third on average, and a larger portion of debts in Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad were incurred for the repayment of earlier debts, hinting that the marked differentiation among the tenantry in terms of indebtedness here was no recent phenomenon. Most of this debt was unsecured (83 per cent on average over the zone as a whole) suggesting, again, a concentration of debt amongst the unprotected subtenants and ordinary tenants, and that the large amount of *malguzari* debt in no way threatened their landholdings.

Between 1873 and 1874, the first statistics compiled on the problem of landlord indebtedness concluded that over a third of proprietary heads of ancestral estates were in debt, 13 per cent owing a sum equivalent to more than five years' revenue, and that overall 9 per cent of estates had been transferred to new proprietors since settlement. By 1888, 19 per cent of *malguzari* land paying land revenue was found to have been permanently transferred.⁴⁰ In Banda and Hatta tahsils of Saugor and Damoh districts, over 27 per cent by area had been transferred; in Murwara tahsil of Jabalpur district, over 30 per cent; in the Ramgarh tahsil of Mandla district, very nearly 27 per cent; and reputedly 25 per cent of Narsinghpur tahsil and just under a quarter of the Seoni tahsil of Hoshangabad district. The district commissioner of Narsinghpur also estimated that, apart from the fifth of the area of the district actually transferred, another fifth was either mortgaged, or had been saved by being taken under the management of the government Court of Wards. Of the total land revenue alienated by 1888, the largest proportion going to 'moneylenders' was in Narsinghpur and Hoshangabad. However, the significance of all this was debatable since census statistics suggested that half the moneylenders in the province had interests in land, and that half the persons who owned land in addition to other occupations were moneylenders.⁴¹

In Jabalpur, Saugor and Damoh, the long-standing indebtedness of many small *malguzars* (resulting from the excessive revenue demands of the early nineteenth century),⁴² and the number of tribal *malguzars* still surviving in the 1860s, meant that the substantial *mahajans*, or moneylenders-cum-grain dealers, had a firm grip. There was a high rate of transfer of village ownership to, as well as between, members of this

class over ensuing decades. In Jabalpur, 16 per cent of villages in the district were transferred between first and second settlements; in Saugor, 34 per cent, or a total of 750 mahals, the principal losers being the 'small farmers' who had 'overdrawn their credit'. The Kurmis here lost 39 of the 154 villages in their ownership between 1867 and 1909.⁴³ The number of villages held by tribal (mainly Gond) landlords also fell, totalling over 90 in the late 1880s but only about 25 (or 1 per cent of the total) in Saugor district by 1911-16. In Damoh, the tribals held 6 per cent of villages in 1867 and less than only 4 per cent by 1909, whilst the much larger Gond population of Jabalpur held only just over 16 per cent of the total number of villages in the district by 1907-12. The principal gainers were the *banias* and Brahmin *mahajans*. Saugor district was typical in that the *banias* held 250 villages at the second settlement of the district and 441 by the third settlement. In Damoh they increased their share from 9 per cent of the total to 15 per cent between 1869 and 1908, the Brahmins increasing their share from 15 per cent to 20 per cent.

The Mahajans

So it was that in the Khurai tahsil of Saugor district, five big moneylenders came to hold between them shares in 189 villages, equivalent to 131 whole *mahals*, or one-quarter of the entire tahsil. Diwan Bahadur Seth Bullubhdas of Jabalpur held a *chaurasi* of approximately 100 villages, Shrimant Seth Mohanlal of Khurai held approximately 50, and the heirs of Rai Sahib Seth Mohanlal of Roanda, Nathuram Singhai of Bina-Etawa and Seth Khetsingh of Khurai each held more than 20 villages.⁴⁴ But these transfers in Khurai really marked the failure of the grain-dealing and moneylending business of the 1880s and 1890s. Before him, Seth Bullubhdas' uncle, Raja Gokuldas, had built up a veritable empire based on moneylending and grain-dealing, in which his landholdings represented but a fraction of his investments. Seth Khet Singh, Shrimant Seth Mohanlal, Seth Birdichand of Rahatgarh and the firm of Seth Karakmal of Ajmer were small but still substantial rivals of the same period.⁴⁵ In Damoh, it was the Pawar-Banias who generally held sway, a prominent Bania landowner being Seth Sukhdeo Munim, agent of the firm of Raghunath Das Hamir Mal of Ajmer.⁴⁶ In Jabalpur district, the Murwara tahsil was a 'happy hunting ground' for the Bania

mahajans based here and in neighbouring Bilheri, one Ram Naik acquiring a total of 23 villages.⁴⁷ The largest share of this trade was held by the *mahajans* who had settled in the district earlier in the nineteenth century. Foremost amongst their number was Rao Bahadur Biharilal, a Bhargava Brahman, who in addition to his moneylending business acquired an estate of 43 villages. The original representative of the family settled in the district in 1820 and was appointed *khazanchi* of three district treasuries, as was his son Biharilal, until 1866, after which the business expanded still further, the family helping to establish a branch of the Bhargava Commercial Bank at Jabalpur in 1893.⁴⁸

Amongst the Bania *mahajans* both here and lower down the Narmada valley, the Marwaris took pride of place, and foremost amongst their number in the second half of the nineteenth century was Raja Gokuldas of Jabalpur, who by 1905 held approximately 30 villages in Narsinghpur tahsil, 10 or 12 in Gadwarah tahsil, a *chaurasi* of 76 villages (increased to 89 by 1912) in Mandla district, and another *chaurasi* (this time of 25 villages) in Wardha district. He also left a total of 158 villages in Jabalpur district itself to his son Jiwandas when he died in 1908. His nephew Ballubhdas held a substantial number of villages as well, principally in Saugor, as did Gokuldas himself. In Narsinghpur, Gokuldas held the large villages of Bachai and Srinagar, the latter since before 1866. Both were former *pargana* headquarters. By the end of the century Raja Gokuldas held the mortgages of many other properties as well, including one among the leading Gond estates which had fallen under the management of the Court of Wards by this date, which contained 84 villages. Gokuldas' estates altogether contained some 800 villages covering a total of 63,000 acres of land.⁴⁹

More important than Gokuldas' landholdings was the grain dealing and moneylending business he conducted through an extensive network of approximately 300 shops which he held scattered throughout the Central Provinces. Like other *mahajans* he moved into industrial undertakings at the end of the century, setting up the Perfect Pottery Works in Jabalpur and the Gokuldas Ballabhdas Spinning and Weaving Mills in 1885 (employing 700 workers, with 277 looms and 15,208 spindles). His family was also a shareholder in the Sakchi Iron Ore company, founded in 1907 by the Tatas and others to mine

in the Satpuras, and set up numerous cotton ginning and pressing factories scattered throughout the Central Provinces and Berar.⁵⁰

As a result of these fantastic concentrations of wealth, 13 per cent of the landholding body of the Jabalpur district held more than 70 per cent of the land as early as 1870. The income-tax levied on these men (supposedly 3.1 per cent) raised an income for the government equivalent to nearly a twentieth of the total land revenue of the district.⁵¹ As with other *mahajans*, the origins of the Gokuldas fortune lay in moneylending and grain-dealing, the unprecedented rise of this particular family firm marching hand in hand with the wheat boom of the 1870s and 1880s. It crumbled just as swiftly under the combined pressure of agricultural depression after 1900 and the extravagance of his heirs, and Ballabhdas was forced to mortgage all his lands in the Central Provinces in 1914.

In Narsinghpur district the principal *mahajans* were the Oswal Marwari banias and the Singhpur Kalars, who owned about 30 villages. Richest of all, according to the Central Provinces provincial banking report of 1929-30, was Rao Sahib Seth Laxminarain of Gadarwara. During the course of the first regular settlement a total of 164 villages, 19 *mahals* and 66 shares were transferred in this district, most going to the moneylending classes.⁵² The principal losers, as elsewhere in central India, were the tribals. In Narsinghpur, the proportion of villages held by Gonds fell from 19 per cent to 13 per cent, and it was said that 'but for government protection and management of the estates of large Gond landlords they would now have scarcely a village left'.⁵³ In Hoshangabad, the proportion of Gond villages fell from 25 to 18 per cent between 1865 and 1908, only the 'Rajputs' doing equally badly, falling from 14 to 7 per cent (but then their numbers may have included a number of Raj-gond *thakurs*). Figures given in the 1891-98 settlement report for Hoshangabad give added confirmation. Here the number of villages held by tribal and pastoral peasants are shown to have fallen, as did that held by Hindu agriculturists, whereas the number held by 'non-agriculturists' rose from 26 to 32 per cent.⁵⁴ Besides Raja Gokuldas of Jabalpur, important recipients were Hari Bai (widow of Seth Narbada Prasad of Gadarwara) who owned 26 villages, Seth Ghasi Ran (her father-in-law) who had a similar estate, and the heirs of Ganesh Pandit, who acquired a total of 25 villages

in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rai Bahadur Seth Tikaram, a Marwari and proprietor of Singhpur, also ran an extensive moneylending business.⁵⁵ Thus it was said that 'there is hardly a single moneylender in the Hoshangabad district who is not a landlord, and many of the landlords, even of agricultural castes, combine the business of a money and grain-dealer with that of a cultivator'.⁵⁶

It was no coincidence that the most infamous landlords of Hoshangabad were mainly absentee, residing away from their estates in the Harda tahsil and living in the towns of Timarni and Harda, a centre of the wheat trade. All were simultaneously moneylenders dealing in grain, the wealthiest being the Shukul family, while amongst others we may mention Sukhdeo Seth (owning 27 villages in Harda tahsil and Nimar district combined) and Nandram Brahman of Magardha (who owned three), though the true power of this class is difficult to estimate, since large firms sometimes operated under different names as landowners and moneylenders.⁵⁷ As always, the key to success in the most important wheat producing tracts lay not just in the exploitation of *malguzari* lands but the use of extortionate loans (as seen in the Bordha and Charwa tracts) and rack-rents of one sort or another in order to gain control over the annual wheat crop produced by the weaker tenantry.⁵⁸ Having gained control of this surplus the *mahajan*, landowner or substantial tenant could play the market and at the same time extend his moneylending business and the loans of seed grain, which promoted the rapid extension of wheat cultivation.⁵⁹

The Super-Exploitation of Labour

Indebtedness among the landlord class often represented a mere shuffling for position and the continued agglomeration of land by the landlord-moneylending elite. Not only did they then profit by the rents and other payments in kind that they were able to extort from the tenantry, but on the land they chose to cultivate themselves they were also able to benefit from the availability of cheap, tribal labour. While the overall costs of direct cultivation increased by something like 80 per cent between the first and second settlements of Hoshangabad, and 98 per cent by 1907,⁶⁰ the price of labour was the one item that declined. Thus in eastern Hoshangabad, the reaping

of the spring harvest was done on contract at the rate of eight *kuros* of mixed grain for every five acres reaped in 1863-64, but by 1893-94 the rate was only six *kuros* (108 lbs). According to one source, only four acres were reaped at this rate, but another gives the *mani* (meaning an area of five acres) as the basis for comparison, whilst a large portion of the grain wage was still made using inferior grains, such as *juar*, which had not risen in price as much as wheat. Grain payments to ploughmen fell too, whilst cash payments generally failed to keep up with the overall rise in prices.⁶¹ In Narsinghpur in 1893 the general price rise since 1860 was estimated at 83 per cent, but the general opinion of the cultivators was that grain wages had remained static. By the 1890s the reaper invariably received one bundle out of every twenty cut by him, whereas formerly the custom was to give two bundles of grain per diem, irrespective of the amount cut, and although the reaper was not always successful in insisting on this rate in the 1860s he did not tend to work so fast.⁶² In Damoh in 1906 it was said that grain wages had not changed within living memory, apart from when grain prices were high, when they tended to be substituted for cash. In real terms this represented a decrease in the rate of payment.

Even the most exaggerated estimate of the cost of labour, 26 per cent of the total value of the harvest in Narsinghpur in 1907, was still remarkably low in view of the increased competition for labour by then from the cotton zone and the recent impact of famine on the death rate. According to the Datta report this is supposed to have raised the nominal wages of agricultural labour in the Central Provinces from virtual stasis to a level 55 per cent higher overall between 1894 and 1907, and real wages by nearly one-third (25 per cent in Berar) over the same period.⁶³ Notwithstanding Datta, however, local evidence for the Narmada valley suggests that wages actually fell in the years immediately after the famine and only returned to their former level a few years later under the pressure of demand from the neighbouring cotton tracts. Thus the rates paid for reaping in eastern Hoshangabad worked out, according to one estimate, at one sheaf in twenty before the famine, but afterwards this fell to one in thirty and then only gradually rose to one in twenty again.⁶⁴ Further corroboration of these trends is available from estimates of the wages of able-bodied agricultural labourers in the Jabalpur district,

which were made for every month in the years between 1873 and 1927. These also suggest a decline in wages in the mid-1880s which ran right through to 1907. Only then did the increase noted by Datta begin. But wages were still lower than in the late 1870s, when they had ranked equal with the best rates being paid in the cotton tracts of Khandesh and Berar.⁶⁵

The explanation for these low wage levels at a time of rapid growth in the wheat economy in the late nineteenth century lay in the availability of cheap and plentiful supplies of labour, a large part of it migrating from the nearby tribal districts of the Satpuras. Whilst the super-exploitation of lesser tenants lay at the core of the wheat economy, this bountiful supply of cheap labour was the leaven which spurred its growth. As late as 1927, long past the heydays of the wheat trade, the total number of migrants flocking into the valley to assist in the harvest operations was estimated at 120,000 while the census of 1921—which was conducted in mid-March and caught a number of districts only at the beginning of the wheat harvest—recorded 18,812 migrant labourers (or *chaitharas*, as they were known) in the Hoshangabad district and 14,862 in Jabalpur; 1921 was a poor year for wheat, but the migrants still amounted to 22 and 13 per cent of the labouring populations of the two districts, respectively. It can be imagined how much higher these figures would have been at the peak of the harvest period in the mid-1880s, when wheat exports were more than three times as high and wheat acreages 35 to 40 per cent greater in extent.⁶⁶ This remarkable phenomenon helps explain how the cultivated acreage and the level of export managed to expand so dramatically at the time when population levels were low and, in some cases, even declining. Thus in Hoshangabad, the gross cultivated areas increased by 45 per cent between 1863-64 and 1892-93, and wheat exports carried by rail from the district tripled, but the density of population, only 118 per square mile in 1872 and 106 per square mile in 1881, was still only 115 per square mile by 1891. At the same time, there is evidence of only a slight increase in the local force of agricultural labourers as a proportion of the total population before the turn of the century. Overall, the number of permanent labourers accounted for 13 per cent of the population, compared with more than 33 per cent in the Nagpur-Berar Plain.⁶⁷

The Collapse of the Wheat Trade

Various reasons have been put forward for the failure of the wheat trade and undoubtedly the explanation lies in a combination of several factors. However, the timing of this decline is important. After the peak year of 1888-89 the quantity of wheat exported declined by 43 per cent from an average of 8,139,000 maunds over the previous eight years to a figure of only 4,613,000 maunds in 1889-90. Only one more year of major exports followed and that was in 1891-92, when 8,693,000 maunds were exported, but then the average price offered was 16 per cent up on the figure for 1889-90 owing to the failure of Russian wheat and rye harvests and the generally poor quality of European crops. For the next two years only just over five and one-half million maunds were exported, a catastrophic decline then occurring in 1894-95. The main cause of this was excessive rain commencing in the autumn of 1892 which brought in its wake a severe attack of rust (a fungus disease) in the Narmada valley. Rust attacked the crop with even greater ferocity in 1894-95, resulting in a crop yield 37 per cent down on the average of the preceding eight years.⁶⁸ By then, stocks had been used up and the decline in exports was dramatic. A shortfall in rain the following year and severe drought in 1896-97, and again in 1889-1900, dealt the final *coup de grace*, after which trade never fully recovered.

A quick glance at Tables 1, 2 and 4 reveals that the decline in the wheat economy cannot be blamed entirely on the succession of poor harvests. The wheat acreage in the wheat zone reached a maximum in 1887-88, after which a gradual decline occurred, upset only in 1892-93, presumably in response to the high prices of the preceding year. Hoshangabad and Narsinghpur, in particular, showed a steady decline. The international demand for Indian wheat disappeared in 1893, owing to competition from cheap Argentinian wheat in European markets.⁶⁹ However, at Rs. 2.25 per maund, the price was no lower locally in 1893-94 than it had been in 1887-88, when total wheat exports were 40 per cent higher, whilst the Bombay wholesale (*khandwa*) and all-India retail prices also remained firm.

The thesis that the relative price of other *rabi* crops was primarily responsible for fluctuations in the wheat acreage might appear substantiated by the marked increase in the

acreage under gram after 1890-91 in Hoshangabad, Narsinghpur, Saugor, Damoh and Jabalpur.⁷⁰ This increase had, however, been going on for a number of years in response to declining yields resulting from the continuous cultivation of wheat, year in year out, without irrigation, manure, rotation or fallowing. The technique was to mix wheat with a nitrogen-releasing leguminous crop, such as gram, from which it was easily separated. The mixture (known as *birra*) had the effect of maintaining a higher outturn than the cultivation of wheat alone.⁷¹ The greater amount of virgin land in the Hoshangabad district meant that the technique was less necessary, the wheat-gram area only increasing from 13,854 acres to 107,213 acres between first and second settlements, compared with an increase in the pure wheat acreage from 455,193 to 517,314 acres.⁷² In Narsinghpur, on the other hand, cultivation was exceptionally dense, 94 per cent of the total occupied area in the Harrai and Mekh-Chhindwara *haveli* village groups being under cultivation. As much as 75 per cent of the cultivated area in some villages in this district as well as Hoshangabad district was covered in wheat. As a consequence, wheat was seldom sown by itself, being nearly always mixed with gram, which accounted for about 18 per cent of the seed sown on average. This mixture resulted in a crop, 85 per cent of which was pure wheat, the outturn being at the rate of about 700 lbs of wheat per acre.

In Jabalpur district and the eastern *haveli* of Narsinghpur, the embanking of wheat fields was another tactic adopted to help retain moisture, discourage weeds (particularly the dreaded *kans* grass) and erosion, and to maintain yields.⁷³ Such techniques were preferred to fallowing as this allowed *kans* to gain a hold, and once this had occurred it was almost ineradicable. The difficulty was that embanking and the continuous cultivation of wheat and gram brought with it the danger of rust (fungus disease) to which both crops were prone, particularly when grown in exhausted soil and in damp conditions. The seeds of disaster in the 1890s were thus being sown at the very height of the wheat boom in the previous decade.

Nonetheless, the boom in wheat cultivation was not purely a response to technical conditions of soil fertility and the improvement in communications. The *social* relations of production were equally important in creating an exportable

surplus of grain, and the onset of decline in the wheat economy of the Narmada valley was not simply the effect of weather, price, or the over-exploitation of the soil. It was also the result of the super-exploitation of the cultivating classes themselves. A major factor here was the cost of seed-grain. In a report on the abatement of land revenue in Hoshangabad district submitted in 1901, C.E. Low commented that 'many tenants are too poor to sow their own holdings', their only chance of getting seed being to sow the holdings of well-to-do absentees on a crop-share basis, a phenomenon he described as being on the increase. He also noted that it was not easy to distinguish the deterioration caused by high rents from that caused by bad seasons.⁷⁴

One bad season alone would be enough to break a severely pressed tenant and if his land fell out of cultivation through his inability to borrow the funds to finance the next year's sowing, *kans* would inevitably take over and deterioration set in. This seems to have been precisely what happened in a number of instances. Poverty also encouraged the cultivation of *juar* and gram, the seed-grain for which was much cheaper than that of wheat.⁷⁵ The Chief Commissioner, D.C.J. Ibbetson, writing in 1899, was also of the opinion that deterioration in the Jabalpur and Hoshangabad districts had more to do with exorbitant levels of rent than harvest failure.⁷⁶ East of Seoni tahsil a great number of fields were found to be out of cultivation and were white with *kans* grass, 15 per cent of Hoshangabad tahsil and 11 per cent of Sohagpur tahsil being covered in *kans* in 1898. The situation was similarly bad in Jabalpur, an abatement of 28 per cent on the land revenue demand in certain villages there being allowed in 1900. Strenuous efforts were made by settlement officers to arbitrate the reduction of rents as well.⁷⁷ The settlements broke down entirely in Hoshangabad and Damoh, rent increases of more than 33 per cent above the level ascertained at the second settlement being banned in all the deteriorated villages of the former district.

Saugor, Jabalpur and Narsinghpur saw a spate of land transfers as indebted petty landowners defaulted in their repayments to the *mahajans*. Totalling all the shares transferred, approximately 40 per cent of all the villages in Jabalpur were transferred between 1889-90 and 1907-08, and in Narsinghpur approximately one-third of all the villages between 1894 and

1904.⁷⁸ Jabalpur (34%), Damoh (31%), Saugor (21%) and Narsinghpur (17%), in that order, also had the greatest number of tenants in straitened circumstances, hopelessly indebted or dependent on the extra income they received from selling their labour (described by settlement officers as class D and E tenants, the latter, rather more dramatically by the Jabalpur Settlement Officer as 'absolutely broken down and living from hand to mouth').⁷⁹ To cope with this problem, efforts were also made to introduce the programme of debt conciliation first proposed by J.B. Fuller for the Saugor district in 1894.⁸⁰ Government officers there had run into opposition from Raja Gokuldas and they did so again, indirectly, when conciliation proceedings were commenced in Hoshangabad district, where Marwari creditors, many in turn financed by Gokuldas, refused to participate.

Greater success was had in Damoh in 1901, where a total of 507 *malguzars* and *patidars* and 8,724 tenants were dealt with, leading to the remission of a total of Rs. 28,000 of debt (though much of this was irrecoverable in any case).⁸¹ Khurai tahsil in Saugor was finally resettled in 1900-01 with a reduction of 57 per cent in the revenue demand and corresponding reductions in rents and debts in 400 out of 548 villages (the remainder being held by Gokuldas).⁸² The total claims dealt with here amounted to Rs. 526,677 (more than half of which was owed in grain), out of which nearly two-thirds were remitted, a total of Rs. 8 lakhs being remitted over the district as a whole. In Hoshangabad, creditors were finally persuaded to write off Rs. 12.5 lakhs of debt and the government itself remitted a total of Rs. 62 lakhs in revenue demand.⁸³

The Central Provinces administration was partly responsible for precipitating the crisis in production in the Narmada valley, by its singularly inappropriate timing in introducing increases in the land revenue demand in the early 1890s, despite the concern then being expressed about the perilous condition of the lesser tenantry upon whom these increases were likely to have been passed given the prevailing state of agrarian relations. Thus in Hoshangabad an 87 per cent increase in the revenue demand was attempted, only to be hastily cut back with the onset of famine. Elsewhere in India, the official reaction to famine and agricultural depression was usually a temporary remission of land revenue, the advance of *takavi* loans (mainly confined to ryotwari areas) and the

establishment of relief works whenever necessary. Similar measures were introduced in central India, but as mere palliatives, often as not aimed exclusively at the revenue-paying classes.

The provincial administration was unusual in that a number of its officers recognised that the crisis was most acute among the class of lesser tenants in the wheat zone, and accordingly placed a greater emphasis, come the 1900s, on a long-term amelioration in their condition by means of debt conciliation and the control of rents. This necessity gave additional pragmatic force to the shift in the government's developmental and tenurial strategy away from the patronage of the *malguzars* and towards the protection of the tenantry, although by then it was too late for reform. The damage had been done, not so much by the weight of the revenue demand itself (amounting to about one-sixth of the value of gross produce in the wheat zone) and its coincidence with a succession of bad harvests, but by the unequal distribution of agricultural resources that the system of settlement had encouraged, a pattern of development that once imposed could not easily be undone. Despite the efforts of settlement officers, the level of rents and the overall rate of surplus appropriation by the *mahajan*-landholding elite remained onerous. Instances still abounded, such as the cases of tenancy debt amounting to 22 and 16 times the rental found in the Satpura and Bohtarai villages in Damoh held by the moneylending firm of Chadmal. Here the saturation point had been reached, the tenants were resigned to remaining bond-slaves and the *mahajan* no longer troubled to add annual interest to the account.⁴⁴ It was this state of enervation that effectively crippled the wheat trade.

Come the 1900s, the competition from Argentinian wheat and bleached hard Canadian wheats in the U.K. market led to a relative lowering in price, and in the Punjab this encouraged buyers and cultivators to invest in improved and purer varieties of seed. By 1925-26, one and one-half million acres were under improved varieties of wheat in the Canal Colonies of the Punjab, three million acres by 1934-45, whilst in the Punjab as a whole, the improved seed acreage increased from 6 per cent to 33 per cent of the total cropped acreage between 1922-23 and 1938-39. In the Central Provinces, by contrast, the lower price of wheat merely encouraged apathy, the improved wheat acreage amounted to only 135,000 acres by 1926-27 and

increased from only 2 per cent of the total cropped acreage to 8 per cent between 1922-23 and 1938-39.⁴⁵ Even this improvement only took place under the impact of a severe rust epidemic in 1927-28 and another frost-cum-rust in 1928, which encouraged the replacement of *pissi* by the rust-resistant variety developed by the Department of Agriculture, known as *sharbati*. At the same time, there was a further decline in the total wheat area under cultivation.⁴⁶

The adoption of *sharbati* was itself a rare success on the part of the Department of Agriculture, which was chronically underfinanced and even as late as 1927-28 had fewer than one assistant for every tahsil of the provinces. Against their efforts was pitted the overt opposition of the local *malguzars* to any form of innovation. One project aimed at improving the quality of seed in the valley, the P-Barhi scheme, under which pure seed was lent to seed unions at a reduced rate of interest of 20 per cent, was floored by just such opposition from the *malguzars*, fearful of the threat to their traditional monopoly over the business of seed loans. The pressures of the depression did not help and the scheme, launched in 1926-27, had collapsed by 1935-36.⁴⁷

Even when the price of wheat had ranged higher in the 1880s and 1890s there had been little investment in agricultural improvement, and cultivating techniques had remained unsophisticated. Typically, only the crude sowing plough or *nari* continued to be used in the Narmada valley, the seed rate being from 100 to 120 lbs per acre. Before this, the field was still prepared using the simple wooden *nagar* plough and the wooden *bakhar* or harrow. Only in embanked fields was the seed drilled into the ground and then there was no preliminary preparation whatever, whilst manuring or irrigation of the fields remained practically unknown. The famines at the turn of the century caused a marked increase in the number of wells in use (from 586 in 1890-91 to 1414 in 1900-01 in Narsinghpur), but there was little increase from this level thereafter, unlike in some of the rice and cotton growing districts. In 1922, the provincial Department of Agriculture was able to boast that it had sold 5,648 iron ploughs since 1907, but the majority of these seem to have gone, again, to the cotton-growing tracts of Nagpur and Berar to the south, not to the wheat zone.⁴⁸

In the Punjab, by contrast, manuring was common and the

wheat seed was usually drilled, requiring only around 50 lbs of seed per acre on average. The field was also usually ploughed several times and levelled before sowing, and this despite the generally high cost of labour here.⁸⁹ The costs of freight and shipping were no more expensive in the Punjab than for central Indian wheat, but the Punjab enjoyed the advantage of massive state-funded irrigation projects and effective co-operative credit and sale societies. The Narmada valley had nothing to compare with this. Narmada wheat, indeed, had not merely failed to improve but had actually deteriorated in quality and could no longer guarantee shippers a regular supply. So it was that, one by one, the trading firms withdrew their agents and, apart from a brief resurgence during the First World War, the trade declined to a mere trickle, at a quarter of its former level in the boom years of the 1880s.

The decline in trade can thus be seen to have been merely a part of a general decline in the wheat economy. Significantly, what were thought to be the richest villages in Hoshangabad were also the slowest to recover in the years after the famine. Population levels generally stagnated and the price of land fell from speculative levels as high as 36 times the level of land revenue in the 1880s, to a low of only ten times the land revenue by 1902.⁹⁰ In terms of rupees per acre the price was virtually stagnant from 1888 right through to 1909. The gradual rise thereafter seems to have been largely due to inflation and the declining relative weight of the government revenue demand. This was by contrast with the cotton zone, where the price of land showed marked fluctuations, quite independent of the general trend in prices or the pressure of the government demand (see Figures 1 and 2). The dramatic escalation in rents of the 1880s and 1890s in the Narmada valley also ceased, and after 1915 the proportion of the total occupied area held by the *malguzars* of the wheat zone began to decline, from 22 per cent in 1884-85 to 16 per cent by 1945.

Apart from the Jabalpur district, there was practically no increase in the number of ploughs to be found, and in the ratio of plough cattle to ploughs (a useful indicator of capital formation in rural areas), a gradual decline is noticeable in nearly all the districts of the wheat zone between 1885-86 and 1925-26. This ratio was 4 : 1 at its peak in Hoshangabad in 1895-96, and 2.9 : 1 by 1925-26, a trend not helped by another scarcity and water shortage in 1920-21. By contrast, plough cattle to plough

FIGURE 1: AVERAGE PRICE OF LAND IN PRIVATE SALES AS A MULTIPLE OF THE LAND REVENUE CHARGE (five year moving averages)

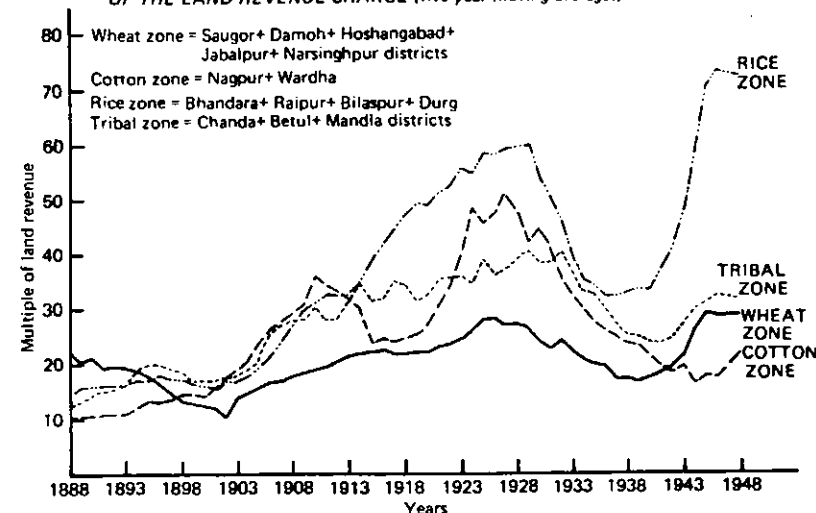
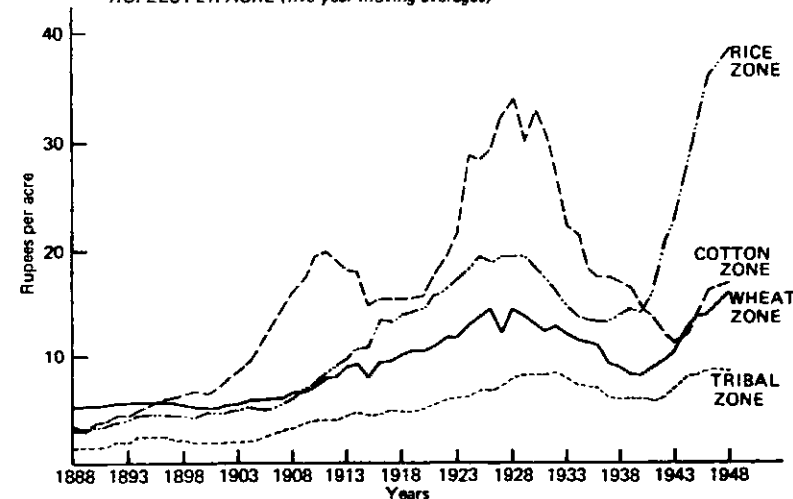


FIGURE 2: AVERAGE PRICE FETCHED BY LAND IN PRIVATE SALES IN RUPEES PER ACRE (five year moving averages)



Source: Proprietary mutation statistics given in the annual C.P. Land Revenue Administration Reports.

rates in the Berar districts to the south typically ranged between six and eight to one throughout most of this period, the quality of these cattle being generally much higher as well. Finally, there was a noticeable increase in the fragmentation of holdings in the north of the Narmada valley, yet another indication of the decline in the extensive, monocultivating wheat economy of the previous half century.

By the early 1920s, gram rather than wheat was said to be the most important export from Narsinghpur district, and *rabi til* was edging out rust-prone linseed among the oilseeds. In Saugor, the cultivators were content to fall back on stock-breeding and dairy farming. Although there were distinct signs of recovery by the end of the 1920s it was diversification away from wheat that was responsible, *ghee* exports from the district by then averaging an annual total of 45,000 maunds. In Hoshangabad and Seoni tahsils, holdings were by then too large and plough cattle too few for the type of soil and the changing pattern of the economy: 'large areas are purportedly kept fallow for the supply of dairy produce; and the tenant is content to take his moderate profits of mixed farming rather than work his land fully'.⁹¹ As might be expected, the substantial landholders of this district seem to have suffered least from the decline of the wheat trade.⁹² What might mean a loss of livelihood to a small tenant or a migrant or resident village labourer was to them merely a decline in profit which they were more or less willing to accept.

Conclusion

The neo-classical arguments used by Eric Stokes caused him to place a heavy reliance on the role of ecology as a means of squaring his analysis of the rise and decline of the wheat economy of the Narmada valley.⁹³ By beginning with the problematic of the development of the trade and market for wheat (the phenomena also most visible in the historical record), rather than the modes of surplus appropriation and the organisation of production in the Narmada valley, Stokes' analysis understressed the unusual differentiation among the peasantry of the region, the dependence on migrant tribal labour and the internal contradictions in the economic development that resulted. Similar shortcomings are noticeable in other works. Dharm Narain, for example, notes a poor correlation between wheat output and price levels in the Central Provinces

between 1900 and 1936, but has no satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon.⁹⁴ R.P. Gupta, in his detailed study of shifts in relative prices and cropping patterns in Madhya Pradesh in the 1950s, also notes the poor price responsiveness of the central Indian peasant, but is at a loss to explain this.⁹⁵ My intention here has been to redress this balance in the conviction that the social relations of production, and features such as the unequal regional division of labour encouraged by colonial rule, played an important role in both fomenting and stymying economic development in central India in the late nineteenth century. These factors are at least as important a condition of economic change as are the logical (but not easily demonstrable) possibilities opened up by the growth of the market economy. They must also form an important element in any explanation of the more recent failures of the Green Revolution in this region. To what extent these structural elements in the economic history of the colonial period have persisted into modern times, and the effects they may have on the cultural and political life of the region, are topics that require further and more detailed research.

APPENDIX

NOTES ON TABLE 1 AND 2

CROP ACREAGE STATISTICS

Sources: CP Annual Administration Reports 1867-68—1890-91;
CP District Gazetteers, volume B, 1891-92—1908-09;
CP and Berar Season and Crop Reports 1909-10—1950-51

Notes: The data for the wheat zone have been summed from district statistics as follows:

WHEAT ZONE = Betul + Chhindwara + Damoh +
Hoshangabad + Jabalpur + Narsinghpur
+ Saugor + Seoni districts

Gross Cropped Acreage (GCA) statistics for each district were not always available and often inaccurate, so these have been recalculated from the available data for each district. A certain

amount of under-renumeration probably occurred before 1909/10 (particularly in the more backward districts), which would affect the GCA totals, but I have not massaged the statistics with weightings in order to compensate for these shortcomings. The arguments of the paper are based on manifold changes observable in the data and these are well beyond most conceivable margins of error. After 1909/10 the very small acreages under miscellaneous food and non-food crops, fibres other than cotton, condiments and spices, maize, ragi, barley and bajra have been excluded from my data base. Similarly, the small area given under 'miscellaneous crops' for the CP districts between 1884/85 and 1889/90 has also been excluded. None of these omissions makes any significant difference to the GCA totals. The wheat area includes the area sown with a mixture of wheat and gram known as *birra*. Current fallows have been excluded from the GCA totals.

Whenever a complete run of data for all the districts of the wheat zone is not available a blank space has been left in the table. In calculating the indices in Table 2, the year 1874-75 was chosen as the base (instead of 1867-68) simply in order to improve comparability with data available for other agro-economic zones.

Further computations on the basis of these data are currently being undertaken.

Abbreviations

The research for this paper was conducted in the Madhya Pradesh Central Record Office, Nagpur, the Agro-Economic Research Centre in Jabalpur, Cambridge University, and the India Office Library, London. All records referred to are from the Nagpur archives except when preceded by 'IOR', when they are from the India Office Records. Other abbreviations used are as follows:

C	Commissioner
CCCP	Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces
CP	Central Provinces
CPPBECR	Central Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report (Nagpur, 1929-30)
CPR	Central Provinces Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce Proceedings
CPSSR	Central Provinces Survey and Settlement Records, 1821-1874
DG	District Gazetteer
GCA	Gross Cultivated Acreage
GI	Government of India

LGI	Letters to the Government of India (from the CP secretariat)
RD Comps.	Central Provinces Revenue Department Complications, 1859-93
SR	Settlement Report

NOTES

1. See the paper by C. Simmons in this volume.
2. Some of these arguments, together with more realistic hypotheses, are to be found in E. T. Stokes' masterly work, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978) chapter 8.
3. This is the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn after the valiant but inconclusive efforts of Blyn, Islam *et al.* to calculate complex output series from the available statistics. In the case of the CP there is the added difficulty that I have found no continuous series of *annevari* estimates for all districts of the CP before 1891 comparable to those used by Blyn after that date, apart from figures available for the years 1867-68 to 1882-83 found in the administration reports. See G. Blyn, *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-97: Output, Availability and Productivity* (Philadelphia, 1966) and M. M. Islam, *Bengal Agriculture 1920-1946: A Quantitative Study*, (Cambridge, 1978). M. B. McAlpin in *Subject to Famine: Food Crises and Economic Change in Western India, 1860-1920* (Princeton, 1983) employs just the sort of aggregations I would take issue with, and although she attacks the reliability of yield estimates she nonetheless gives them an important and extremely suspect role in her analysis as an indicator of mortality. See my review in *Modern Asian Studies* (1985), 866-871. Satish Mishra has admirably analysed much of the literature on yield statistics in his Ph.D. thesis 'Patterns of Long-run Agrarian Change in Bombay and Punjab, 1881-1972' (University of Cambridge, 1981). I have also been strongly influenced by the conclusions of Sumit Guha and the cautionary comments on official statistics made by Clive Dewey. See Sumit Guha, *The Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan, 1818-1941* (Delhi, 1985), and C. Dewey, 'Pathvari and Chaukidar: Subordinate Officials and the Reliability of India's Agricultural Statistics' in *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, ed. C. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins (London, 1978), 280-314.
4. This was a general phenomenon, the consequence of competition from imports from the United Provinces and Bombay. See IOR, J. B. Fuller, Off. Director of Agriculture to CCCP, 22 August 1883, *Sugarcane Report for the Year 1882-83*.
5. See *Report on the Trade and Resources of the CP* (hereafter *CP Trade Report*), 1875-76, 18, and *Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India* (Delhi, 1937), 48.
6. *Index Numbers of Indian Prices, 1861-1931* (Delhi, 1933), plus annual addenda.
7. *Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India*.
8. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 12.
9. Hoshangabad DG, 164-65.
10. Narsinghpur SR, 1885-94, 22.

11. It ought to be noted that these local prices, averaged over the year, were usually calculated from *kusha* or market town prices. In a developed district like Hoshangabad this was probably not a bad guide, but harvest prices in the villages could be much lower. The reverse might also be the case. Thus in Sambalpur district, while the average village price of rice attested between 1886 and 1888 was 35 to 40 seers per rupee, the *kusha* or bazaar rate at which grain could be sold was 18 to 25 seers due to a combination of the *banias*. In Jabalpur though, the difference between village and bazaar rates was thought to have narrowed from plus 100 per cent (1861-63) to plus 12 per cent (1887-92). A similar trend was apparent in Nagpur, where the discrepancy only amounted to 34 per cent in 1863-70 and 14 per cent by 1886-90. This greater conformity in prices was largely caused by the export trade. See J.B. Fuller, Memo. on Prices and Rents, 18 February 1892, CPSSR, bundle 3/1/1892/147. The local prices quoted here have been compiled from official series published in the CP Administration Reports for 1867/8-1900/01, volume B of the District Gazetteers for 1900-1909, and the CP Season and Crop Reports after 1904/05. Those quoted after 1904/05 purported to be harvest prices representative of the whole district, but it is to be doubted that the method of compilation or degree of error changed very much.
12. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 10.
13. *The Wheat Production and Trade of India* (Simla, 1879).
14. See CP Land Revenue Administration Reports for 1886-87 and 1888-89, statement D; G. Evans, *Varieties of Wheat Grown in the C.P.* (Nagpur, 1908) 25ff; *The Wheat Production and Trade of India* (Calcutta, 1883), 91; LGL, J.W. Chisholm, GI, Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce, 21 September, 1877, Memo on Wheat Cultivation and Exportation; CP Land Revenue Administration Report, 1883-84, 5; also Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 26, which describes 80 per cent of the wheat area as *pissi*.
15. *The Indian Wheat Trade* (Calcutta, 1893), 90-91. LGL, J.B. Fuller, 2 October 1882, Report on Wheat Cultivation.
16. George Watt, 'Wheat', vol. 6, part II of the *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* (Calcutta, 1889), 88 and 108-9.
17. CP Revenue Administration Report, 1871-72, 25.
18. George Watt, *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*, vol. 6, part II, 108-9 and 101.
19. *Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India* (Delhi, 1937), Chapter IX and Appendix XLVIII.
20. *The Indian Wheat Trade* (Calcutta, 1893), 302.
21. *Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India* (Delhi 1937), Chapter V and CP Revenue Administration Report, 1877-78, 9.
22. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 61, cited in Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, op. cit., 258.
23. Jubbulpore SR, 1886-94, 23.
24. J.B. Fuller, *Review of Progress in the Central Provinces in the last 30 years, and of the Present and Past Condition of the People* (Nagpur, 1892), 45.
25. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 33-34.
26. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 34.
27. Saugor SR, 1887-97, 42. CPSSR, Bundle 143/7-1904/2/5-7. M.W. Fox-Strangways, C of Jubbulpore, commented on the moneylending firm of

- Raja Gokuldas: 'it is generally found that in villages held by this firm the actual pitch of rent makes little difference, the tenants being for the most part hopelessly indebted to the firm for seed grain and on other accounts'
28. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 33-4.
29. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 39.
30. See Jubbulpore SR, 1886-94, 38 and Jubbulpore SR, 1907-12, 30. Thakur Hanuman Singh of Barwara, a large landlord in Jabalpur, owning 54 villages, was actually said to have taken to leasing the right to collect his *bhag* rents to speculative middlemen at the end of the nineteenth century. See also Damoh SR, 1888-89, 22. Gond cultivators here often paid up to one-third of their crop in *bhag* rents, as well as paying in kind for the bullocks they borrowed in order to cultivate.
31. Hoshangabad SR, 1913-18, 30.
32. CP Revenue Administration Report, 1889-90, 7.
33. J.B. Fuller, *Review of Progress*. See comments on this in Narsinghpur DG, 1971, 282.
34. J.B. Fuller, *Review of Progress*, 41.
35. See also RD Comps. 1888-89, no. 237(a): Indebtedness of Proprietors and Land Transfer in the CP. J.B. Fuller to GI, 25 July, 1888.
36. J.B. Fuller, *Review of Progress*, 47.
37. See the (Dufferin) *Enquiry into the Condition of the Agricultural Classes of India* (Calcutta, 1888).
38. *Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India* (Delhi, 1937).
39. See CPPBECR, 104-5, 119, 122, and 125.
40. *Selection of Papers on Agricultural Indebtedness*, vol. I (Simla, 1898), 73. The 1873-74 statistics are cited in full by Peter Harnetty in Table 5 of his paper 'A Curious Exercise in Political Economy': Some Implications of British Land Revenue Policy in the Central Provinces of India, 1861-c.1900', *South Asia*, 6(December, 1976), 14-33.
41. According to the census of 1891, 20 per cent of the 32,685 individuals recorded as 'moneylenders and pawn-brokers' over the province as a whole, combined this occupation with land owning, and 30 per cent held tenant land. On average, 5.6 per cent of all 'non-agriculturists' combined their principal occupation with some form of landowning, compared with only 4 per cent of agriculturists (including field labourers). See *Census of India*, 1891, vol. 2, Table XVIIIC, 266.
42. See, for example, Jubbulpore SR, 1886-94, 24.
43. Jubbulpore DG, 190, Saugor DG, 33.
44. Also well known were Ajmullah Khan and Sir Kasturchand Daga, who bought the Kesli tappa, see Saugor SR, 1911-16, 7 and 9.
45. Saugor SR, 1887-97, 43.
46. Damoh SR, 1866, 21 and para 29.
47. Jubbulpore SR, 1886-94, 21-2, and Jubbulpore DG, 145.
48. Jubbulpore DG, 138.
49. See Jiwanchandra Mukerji, *Biography of Raja Gokuldas* (Jabalpur, 1929), and *Services of the late Raja Gokuldas and his family to the Government and the Public* (privately printed copies of letters and official commendations, dating from the late nineteenth century, published c.1920-25). This latter source makes it clear that Gokuldas lent money to nearly every encumbered zamindar to be found in the Narmada valley in the last two decades

- of the nineteenth century, as well as eminent individuals such as Sivaji Rao Holkar and the Maharaia of Jodhpur. The decline of the family's fortunes and their move into politics is charted by Gokuldas' grandson, Govindas, in his three volume autobiography, *Uthai-Puthai Ko Yug*. For further details, the readers is referred to P.F. McDowd's 'Colonial Administration and Social Developments in Middle India: the Central Provinces 1861-1921', (Ph.D. thesis, University of Virginia, 1980). Chapter eight gives an excellent account of Raja Gokuldas, based partly on the above-mentioned sources. Peter Harnetty also describes the parallel fortunes of a number of 'banker-zamindars' in his paper 'The Landlords and the Raj: the Malguzars of the Central Provinces, 1861-1921' (presented at Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Library, Delhi, in March 1981). Other sources I have used include Jubbulpore DG, 143-44, and Mandla SRs.
50. See Jubbulpore DG, 143-44; Frank Harris, J.N. Tata: A Chronicle of His Life (Delhi, 1958), 191, and Wardha DG, 84 and 144.
 51. CP Revenue Administration Report, 1870-71, 49.
 52. Narsinghpur SR, 1885-94, 28.
 53. Narsinghpur DG, 122.
 54. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 34.
 55. Narsinghpur SR, 1885-94, 28.
 56. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 34.
 57. Peter Harnetty cites the case of Mukhundran Sukal and others in footnote 64 of his paper 'A Curious Exercise of Political Economy'.
 58. Hoshangabad SR, 1913-18, 30.
 59. CP Revenue Administration Report, 1884, 5.
 60. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 3 and Hoshangabad DG, 177.
 61. See Hoshangabad SR, 1913-18, 21ff, Hoshangabad DG, 169-172 and Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 30. One kuro was equal to 10-16 seers (a seer being 2.14 lbs).
 62. CPSSR, Bundle 11/8/1893/147/(16)/9410. Preliminary Report on the Gadawara tahsil in Narsinghpur district.
 63. Narsinghpur DG, 131, and K.L. Datta, *Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India*, 5 vols. (Calcutta, 1914), 25, 215 and 235.
 64. Hoshangabad DG, 171-2.
 65. These statistics are available from the CP administration reports, the series of Prices & Wages in India and vol. B of the Jabalpur DG.
 66. Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, (London, 1927), vol. VI, 5; Census of India, 1921, vol. XI, part I, 12.
 67. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 11. Further details on migration, labour and the occupational evidence afforded by the Census reports are to be found in C.N. Bates, 'Regional Dependence and Rural Development in Central India: the Pivotal Role of Migrant Labour,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 3 (1985).
 68. CP Trade Report, 1894-95.
 69. See CP Trade Reports for 1894-95 and 1895-96.
 70. The Jowar (Juar) acreage increased in Seoni, Betul and Chhindwara, but this was a kharif crop and therefore not directly substitutable.
 71. Narsinghpur SR, 1885-94, para. 32.
 72. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 26.
 73. Narsinghpur SR, 1885-94, 13, and Narsinghpur DG, 1971, Chap. IV, 125ff.

74. CPSSR, Bundle 115/2/1901/1/1&2. Abatement of Land Revenue in Hoshangabad district. Report submitted by C.E. Low, 14.3.1901, 7ff.
75. A settlement officer of Saugor regarded the fact that in 1893-94 541,000 out of 1,036,000 acres were sown with wheat and its mixtures as a serious threat: 'The great rust of 1893-94 inaugurated more enlightened methods; not indeed because the faults of the existing system were recognised, but, as contemporary records clearly show, because shortage of seed grain made wheat cultivation on the old scale impossible'; this shortage was also engendered by poverty. See CPSSR, Bundle 268/1911/21-16/20. Forecast report of Saugor resettlement by G.L. Corbett, Assistant C, 31 Oct 1910.
76. CPR, January-April 1900, no. 6. R.H. Craddock to GI, 12 February, 1900, enclosing Note by CCCP on revision of Hoshangabad Settlement, 24 June 1899, IOR.
77. CPR, May-August 1900, no. 4, Craddock to C of Jubbulpore, 4 June 1900 and January-April 1901, no. 1, Craddock to C of Settlements and Agriculture, 2 April 1901. According to the Central Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report, two-thirds of farm land in the Narsinghpur district was still infested with *kans* as late as 1929. See CPPBECR, IV, 852.
78. Jubbulpore DG, 190; Narsinghpur DG, 1971, 171.
79. Jubbulpore SR, 1912, 3; Damoh SR, 1908-13, 19; Saugor SR, 1911-16, 35; Narsinghpur SR, 1923-26, 61.
80. CPSSR, Bundle 46/1/1895/2/127-130. J.B. Fuller to CCCP, 19 July 1894 and Bundle 143/7/1904/2/5-7, Memorial from the Firm of Raja Gokuldas, Rai Bahadur Ballabh Das and Seth Jiwan Das, Bankers, Jubbulpore, 13 October, 1903.
81. CPR May-August 1901, no. 7, F.A.T. Phillippis, Off. C of Narmada to CCCP, 20 July, 1901, and January-April 1902, no. 1, R.H. Craddock, Off. C of Nagpur to CCCP, 3 January, 1902, IOR. On the operation of the CP Debt Conciliation Boards in Balaghat and Bhandara districts, Parliamentary Papers, LXX (1902), 539.
82. CPSSR, Bundle 128/1/1902/2/15, Papers on Conciliation and abatement proceedings in Khurai tahsil, Saugor.
83. Saugor SR, 1911-16, 36; Hoshangabad SR, 1913-18, 4. See also CPPBECR, 149-50.
84. Damoh SR, 1908-12, 20.
85. Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India (Delhi, 1937), 23, and G. Blyn, *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947: Output, Availability and Productivity* (Philadelphia, 1966), 200.
86. Jubbulpore DG, 1971, 205.
87. Saugor DG, 1967, 158 and 146; Report on the Marketing of Wheat in India (Delhi, 1937), 48.
88. D. Clouston, *The Organisation of the Department of Agriculture*, Department of Agriculture Bulletin no. 13 of 1921 (Nagpur, 1922).
89. A. & G.L.C. Howard, *Wheat in India, its Production, Varieties and Improvement* (Calcutta, 1909).
90. Hoshangabad SR, 1891-98, 36.
91. Narsinghpur SR, 1923-26, 32; Saugor SR, 1911-16, 2; Hoshangabad SR, 1913-18, 18.
92. Despite the evidence of deterioration, the third settlement of

Hoshangabad district still revealed a total of 31 per cent of the tenants in class B (that of the substantial or well-to-do tenantry) and a further 50 per cent in class C, thereby confirming the general character of the social differentiation we have observed in the development of the Narmada valley. See *Hoshangabad SR*, 1913-18, 28-9.

93. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, op. cit., ch. 68.
94. D. Narain, *Impact of Price Movements on Areas under Selected Crops in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge, 1965), 152-154.
95. R.P. Gupta, *Agricultural Prices in a Backward Economy* (Delhi, 1973).